



**Victorian
Women
Lawyers**



➤ WORD FROM
CONVENOR

➤ EVENT
REPORTS

➤ UNDER THE
SPOTLIGHT

Allens Arthur Robinson 

MinterEllison 

Blake Dawson

CLAYTON UTZ



Maddocks

MALLESONS STEPHEN JAQUES

middletons
straight talking

Dear Member,

WORDFROMTHECONVENOR

While VWL is maturing as an organisation, our objectives remain as relevant as ever. It is still important for women to work on law reform, promote women's legal and human rights, encourage and foster women's legal education and to actively promote the advancement of women in the legal profession. If you are not actively involved I encourage you to make contact with VWL.

There are many different ways you can be involved. Your involvement can range from attending an event, to contributing to Portia, to joining a committee. Not only can you help make a difference, you will also find it a rewarding experience.

The Victorian Women Lawyers' Annual General Meeting on 26 November 2009 saw my term as 2009 Convenor come to an end. I thank Astrid Haban-Ber, the Executive, Committee Chairs and Committee Members for all their hard work during the year. Thank you also to all everyone who attended the AGM and helped us reflect and celebrate on the year. I also congratulate Astrid Haban-Ber on her election as Convenor for 2010 and wish her all the best for the year ahead! Finally, thank you to all our members for your support in 2009.



Jennifer Kanis

AWORDFROMTHEINCOMING CONVENOR2010 [\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

It was my honour to be elected as your Convenor for the year ahead at the VWL Annual General Meeting. I will do my best to fulfill the responsibility of this position. The AGM revealed VWL's very healthy state of affairs, and acknowledged our achievements over 2009. The AGM was followed by the VWL Christmas party. Thank you to all who attended this fabulous event. As well as some great music

and canapes, those in attendance at the Christmas party were also engaged by our guest speaker, Jenny Lawton, who spoke about the role and challenges faced by Bushfire Legal Help in the wake of the devastating February bushfires.

The newly elected Executive is extremely motivated about the year ahead, and we already have a number of events planned for the first quarter of next year including the Opening of the Legal Year Portia Laneway Breakfast (in collaboration with the Victoria Law Foundation), a seminar during Law Week, the Dame Roma Mitchell Memorial luncheon, and the Women's Achievement Awards.

The new Executive held its planning day on 5 December 2009, to consider what we want to achieve for our members, women in and outside of the law and the wider community. This strategic planning day is an important process and assists us to determine how to best direct our efforts and energy towards championing substantive equality for women.

I was recently reminded of the Listening Tour that Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Elizabeth Broderick, undertook at a national level in 2008. Commissioner Broderick's tour asked Australians: 'How far have we come in our journey towards gender equality? And where should we focus our efforts into the future?' It would be no surprise to VWL members that the Listening Tour revealed that gender inequality exists so pervasively in all elements of women's lives - in the workplace, in the home, in daily life. You can read the report into the Listening Tour at

http://www.humanrights.gov.au/sex_discrimination/listeningtour/index.html

I would like to ask our members the same questions in relation to our work as lawyers. How far has the legal profession come in the journey towards gender equality? I suspect that although there may be some positive responses, the reality of the matter is that women in the law remain on unequal footing compared to our male counterparts - in pay, in promotion opportunities, in getting briefs, and so on. Please tell us your experiences and your concerns. We would also like your thoughts - where should VWL focus its efforts in 2010? What would you like to see more of, or less of? What should VWL be doing to address your concerns? Please let me know your thoughts - at any stage of the year (astrid.haban-beer@ags.gov.au).

Finally, as the festive season approaches, let's remember and extend a hand to those having a hard time - those who are homeless, ill, lonely, or troubled. VWL is interested not only in gender equality, but in social justice more widely. Let's remember too that domestic violence can be exacerbated at Christmas time. The main victims, as we well know, are women and children.

I wish you all a safe and happy summer, and I look forward to meeting you next year.



Astrid Haban-Beer

Expressions Of Interest Sought

Communications Committee Members Victorian Women Lawyers is seeking expressions of interest for membership of the Communications Committee. Please contact Astrid Haban-Beer at astrid.haban-beer@ags.gov.au for further information.

EVENTREPORTS [BACK TO TOP]

As stated above, on 26 November 2009, VWL held its AGM at the offices of Maurice Blackburn. This was followed by the VWL Christmas Party. The VWL Executive for 2010 was elected at the AGM. Congratulations to the following members who were elected to the Executive:

Convenor Astrid Haban-Beer

Immediate Past Convenor Jennifer Kanis

Assistant Convenor Kate Ashmor

Secretary Beth Hilton-Thorp

General Members Melanie Hodge, Jackie Gillies, Susan Pryde

Treasurer Anna Tang

For photos of this event, please [click here](#)

UNDERTHESPOTLIGHT [BACK TO TOP]



This month we profile **Sarah Birrell**, Senior Associate, Energy and Resources Group.

I became a lawyer because ... well, I really wanted to be a lion tamer, but thought the law might provide more career opportunities than lion taming. On a more serious note, I didn't have a very clear idea of what being a lawyer might involve when I started my studies. In hindsight, I became a lawyer because I thought it would be intellectually stimulating and challenging. And it is.

I am really proud of ... some of my most rewarding experiences have arisen from working as a volunteer lawyer for the Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic. In one matter, with a couple of other lawyers from Allens, we acted for a client who had over 150 fines, totalling around \$35,000. At the Magistrates' Court hearing, the Magistrate withdrew all of the fines on the grounds of the client's special circumstances.

You can have it all ... I am aspiring to this but haven't quite got there yet. However, if you have a flexible employer, then you are most of the way there.

I am extremely grateful for ... continuing on the theme of flexibility, the fact that Allens was flexible enough to allow me to take a couple of years off to travel and to study a masters in law in London and then come back refreshed and ready for some interesting legal work.

A key mentor who influenced my career is ... there is no single person who has influenced my career. However, what I do enjoy about my job is that it gives me the opportunity to work with a variety of extremely capable partners and special

counsel. As each person has their individual style, inevitably, you learn different things from each of them.

If I wasn't a lawyer ... and I didn't become a lion tamer, then I would like to be an explorer.

Before I started at Allens Arthur Robinson ... I spent a year working as a Judge's Associate in the Victorian Supreme Court, which was a fantastic experience, and then a year travelling with friends through China, Nepal, parts of Europe and the Middle East ... and Western Australia for some windsurfing.

The best advice I ever received was ... there's no need to live things twice . If you're nervous or apprehensive about something then don't spend all your time playing out the scenario in your mind before you actually need to do it.

One of the key legal initiatives I am involved in ... is helping with the development of Allens' climate change group, led by Grant Anderson. As you can imagine, introduction of the proposed Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme has significant ramifications for many of our clients in the energy and resources sectors.

Outside of the law ... It's hard to choose between the mountains and the sea - I enjoy windsurfing, although my gear has been sitting in the shed gathering dust lately, and getting out into the hills for some bushwalking.

VWL COMMITTEES [\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

VWL COMMITTEES

Joining a committee is a great way to become more involved with VWL. All committee work is voluntary. The time commitment is flexible; we are looking for enthusiasm most of all. Please send your expression of interest in joining a committee(s) to our Secretary, Beth Hilton-Thorp at jthorp@bigpond.net.au

Our committees are:

Justice - dealing with all justice related issues including submissions to government, organising the annual sexual assault forums, supporting indigenous law students, spearheading the Women Migrant's Legal Information Project.

Work Practices - addressing the important issues that affect women lawyers in the workplace; conducting research, and holding forums.

Networking - organising events with many organisations including the Women Barristers Association, liaising with regional lawyers networks, and encouraging members and friends events.

Communications - organising this newsletter, co-ordinating the editing and publication of Portia, our annual magazine, and liaising with the media.

Membership - Looking after our members needs and promoting VWL membership within the legal community.